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ABSTRACT

This brief paper presents a guide to detecting and addressing sexist bias in books and other instructional materials. Some research studies that identify sex bias in curriculum materials are cited. It is noted that evidence of sexism is present in all areas; by words and pictures textbooks convey that men act in different, superior ways from women and that this difference is socially acceptable. Steps that teachers, administrators, school boards, parents and community groups might take to combat sex role stereotyping are enumerated. References are also included. (KR)

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How To Recognize and Combat Sexism in Curriculum Materials

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Presented at the First Congress on Education
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I would like to open my presentation by asking a few questions that may help each of you to determine your own consciousness level on sex-role stereotyping.

- Do you expect girls to be more verbal and artistic than boys?
- Do you expect boys to be more mathematical and scientific than girls?
- Do you expect and encourage boys to act independent, rough, and boisterous?
- Do you expect and encourage girls to act dependent, quiet, and gentle?
- Do you feel it is all right for girls to cry when they are hurt, but feel that boys should "grin and bear it?"
- Do you expect and encourage girls to be interested in home, family, and child care?
- Do you expect and encourage boys to be interested in sports and cars?
- Do you encourage boys to play one kind of instrument in the band or orchestra (drum, trumpet) and encourage girls to play another (flute, piano)?
- Do you ask boys to do heavier outside chores like mowing the lawn, shoveling snow, and ask girls to do lighter inside chores like washing the dishes or setting the table?

People are often unaware that they are looking at and judging a child's actions, personality, activities, and options for future jobs according to his/her sex rather than his or her abilities and interests.

SEXISM OR SEXIST PRACTICE can be defined as pre-judging a person because of his or her sex. Illustrations of this are:

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a. propagating different ideas of behavior and mores for boys than girls

b. insisting by words and pictures that men act in different ways from women and that this difference is normal, natural, and socially valuable

c. limiting the aspirations of females while encouraging males to acquire a wide variety of skills and achievements.

BOOKS AND OTHER INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS ARE SEXISTS IF:

- they omit the actions and achievements of women
- demean women through patronizing language
- show men and women only in sterotyped roles with less than the full range of human, interests, traits, and capabilities.

RESEARCH STUDIES IDENTIFYING EVIDENCE OF SEX BIAS IN CURRICULUM MATERIALS:

Most focus upon school textbooks. There are required reading for students and imply official approval of the content. Would like to briefly cite some of these studies:

I. EAST END EDUCATION COMMITTEE reviewed 36 textbooks used in the Pittsburgh public schools in areas of Language, Reading, Science, & Math in K-5th grades. They found evidence of sexism in all areas. Some examples were:

- More pictures of males than females. In some books as high as 4 to 1.
- Active agressive roles were reserved for males, subdued reticent roles for females.
- Activities indicated boys were more imaginative and mechanically minded.
- Boys get the message that they are superior and above household chores - independent, and courageously coping with anything that might happen.
- Girls do not usually excel and their fulfillment lies chiefly in giving happiness to boys and men.
- Science books only show boys using microscopes, tools, and doing things. Girls are recording the results. Women scientists are ignored in science as well as history resulting in few female role models.

II. An extensive study was done by Lenore Weitzman and Diane Rizzo on analysis

of textbook illustrations for age, sex and race in the most widely used textbooks in the U.S. at the elementary level. The report of this study was entitled Biased Textbooks.

Summary of their findings in regard to sex:

- Illustrations showed males in 69% and females in 31%; 3 to 1 ratio.
- Action illustrations showed boys in active, outdoor, skillful and adventurous activities. Girls were shown as passive, watching the boys, pursuing homemaking or grooming activities.
- Adult occupational roles indicated men in over 150 roles. While most adult women were shown as housewives or mothers. A few were working as teachers, librarians, sales clerks, and nurses.
- Science texts give women no active role in this field. Women were mainly observers. Adult women were illustrated in only 6% of the pictures.

Weitzman and Rizzo concluded that new images of adult women and adult role models were needed for young girls and these were severely lacking in the textbooks they reviewed.

III. A study of elementary math texts was done by NOW in New York City.

In analyzing math problems in a social context, they found:

- In a specific series of 10 problems, 5 had boys working at physical activities, and 2 had girls babysitting and sewing.
- Another series of 12 problems, 11 had boys earning money, building things, and going places while one had a girl buying ribbon for a sewing project.
- There were many instances of women and girls shopping, cooking, & sewing, while men were building, repairing, hiking, driving cars, etc.

IV. Another study of both pictures and problems in math texts by Barbara Steele concludes that these texts indicate women should be subservient and passive with their main interests confined to good grooming and homemaking. Boys must be adventuresome, strong, athletic, and active.

V. Reading texts and books for pleasure reading were the subject of a number

of studies.

- One study of the 49 Newbury Award winners of American Library Association found that books about boys outnumbered girls 3 to 1. In the 1967 winner the male hero has this advice for the heroine "Accept the fact that this is a man's world and learn how to play the game gracefully."

- In a study of pictures in reading texts in California schools, Marjorie U'Ren found only 15% of the illustrations focused upon girls and women. Most had females in the background. Girls were also shorter and smaller than the boys. This conflicts with physical development in which girls mature earlier and are often taller and heavier than boys.

The evidence of sexism in these books is not the result of a conspiracy by the authors, illustrators, or publishers to put down women, but is somewhat unintentional. The instructor of a course in writing for children indicated "The wise author writes about boys, insuring himself a maximum audience, since only girls will read a book about a girl, but both boys and girls will read about a boy" If this is true, how can one explain the popularity of Alice in Wonderland?

I hope I have convinced you that sex biased instructional materials do exist and are being used in our schools. The next step is what can we do about them?

TEACHERS can point out sexist bias in books or other materials to students. And help them learn to identify sources of bias and omissions in the materials.

- Develop classroom activities around identifying bias found in television, textbooks, movies, library books, magazines, etc.
- Identify or develop supplementary materials which can help "correct" some of the bias of available materials.

ADMINISTRATORS can implement selection policies for new materials that will ensure bias free curriculums. When complete replacement is not possible, supplemental materials should be provided to balance those currently in use.

-Express concern for observation of bias-free guidelines to the commercial sector and public and private agencies.

- Administrators should enlist teacher support in using bias-free guidelines in the classroom and in monitoring all acquired materials.

SCHOOL BOARDS ALONG WITH ADMINISTRATORS can:

- Develop a policy statement outlining a concern for eliminating sexist stereotyping in textbooks, library books, and other curriculum materials.
- Appoint a task force to investigate sex bias in the school and community.
- Develop guidelines to use in purchasing and using books and other materials
-Earmark a portion of funds to purchase nonsexist supplementary materials.
- Develop and implement a plan for inservice training of all personnel who purchase, recommend, or use textbooks and other instructional materials.
- Call on state departments, teacher-training institutions, and professional organizations to provide materials, workshops and technical assistance in this area.
- Interpret the problems of biased textbooks and other materials to parents, community groups, and policy making boards. Enlist their support in solving the problem.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS can:

- Read the textbooks and materials their children are using and identify sources of bias where they exist.
- Work with other parents and groups to raise their awareness of the problem of biased materials.
- Organize a study of the bias of textbooks used in their schools. Publicize the results and make recommendations for change.
- Write to textbook publishers and indicate dissatisfaction with biased

materials. Support examples of non-sexist books that have been developed.

Some textbook publishers have responded to the concerns of parents and educators and have developed guidelines for bias-free books and illustrations.

I would like to cite a few examples of some of these guidelines.

- The actions and achievements of women should be recognized.
- Women and girls should be given the same respect as men and boys.
- Abilities, traits, interests and activities should not be assigned on the basis of male or female stereotypes.
- The language used should not exclude women or be patronizing toward women. Examples - man should not be used to represent humans or people. Replace occupational terms and titles ending in -man with terms including members of either sex (salesman with salesclerk, fireman with firefighter)
- Recrute more women as authors and contributors to represent their viewpoints.
- Avoid job stereotypes - no job should be considered sex typed.

A number of groups and organizations are active in combating sexism in all areas. The Ontario Status of Women Council has developed an excellent booklet entitled "About Face: Towards a More Positive Image of Women in Textbooks".

The Feminist Press was established in Old Westbury, N.Y. to encourage female writers, artists, designers and editors. Their publication on Nonsexist Curricular Materials for Elementary Schools is excellent.

The ultimate goal of a biased free curriculum is to enable children to see themselves as individuals relating to other individuals rather than as boys or girls relating to members of the same or opposite sex. The curriculum would not ignore the fact that sex differences do exist, but these would be seen as one of the small contributions toward a person's individuality.

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